

Pet Abuse as Part of Intimate Partner Violence

Abstract

The intersection between the abuse of women and children and the abuse of pets has long since been established, but less has been known about the role that the abuse of women's pets plays in their experiences of intimate partner violence. Accordingly, this research aimed to explore victims' experiences of the abuse of their pets, and how this influenced their attempts at seeking safety.

Pets represent close and affectionate relationships for many victims. The affection that victims held for their pets was frequently exploited by intimate partners, who threatened or carried out abuse against victims' pets as a way to demonstrate force and induce compliance. This abuse directed at victims' pets both delayed and in many cases precluded their attempts to leave the abuser, and led to significant suffering both by pets and by the primary victim of the abuse.

The motivations driving abusers' use of violence towards pets can arguably be understood as indicative of underlying abusive intentions towards women. Three distinct motivations were interpreted from this research - control and intimidation, assertions of supremacy, and silencing of disclosures. These, in addition to their paralyzing impacts, have important ramifications for domestic violence work. In addition, the role that pets unwittingly play as pawns of the abuser highlights the need for tailored services to be offered to them as additional (and pivotal) victims of the abuser.

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Introduction

For many women living with intimate partners who use abuse to exercise power and control over them, animals represent both a source of comfort and a source of vulnerability. Pets and farm animals can represent some of the most meaningful relationships in victims' lives, and for many, these constitute family relationships. Unfortunately, many victims are forced to bear witness to the same brutality towards their pets that they are subjected to themselves, as the person who abuses them also threatens, frightens, harms, and even kills the animals that they care for.

This extension of gender-based violence towards the pets and other animals of the household thus demands an additional dimension of safety planning be considered in domestic violence work – both leaving and staying with an abuser are options made more complicated for victims by threats towards animals. The belief that an abuser will follow through on a threat towards a pet or farm animal if the victim does not comply with their wishes is a compelling reason to stay, and an absence of viable alternatives for housing or caring for those animals precludes women's seeking of avenues for safety.

Accordingly, this research explored victims' experiences of having a pet or farm animal abused in the context of intimate partner violence, and the ways in which this influences their abilities to leave the abuser. Finally, it sought to consider the utility of pathways that cater to the needs of victims with animals that are primary or secondary victims of their partner's abuse.

Background

Many adults regard pets and other animals as members of their family; or, at a minimum, as treasured companions (Flynn, 2000). Violence towards these pets is known to be inexorably associated with other criminal acts (Baldry, 2003; Henry, 2004). In situations of intimate partner violence, this association is principally manifest in abusers' use of animals as 'weapons', by using threats of harm to induce submissive behaviour (DeVoe & Smith, 2002; Loring & Beaudoin, 2000).

The intentional harming of animals is inherently associated with the intentional harm of other humans. A study of shelter residents versus women who had never been in a relationship with an abuser showed that the residents' partners were almost 11 times more likely to have intentionally harmed an animal than the partners of non-abused women (Ascione, Weber, Thompson, Health, & Maruyana et al., 2007). The authors further found that high scores on the Conflict Tactics Scale were highly predictive of abuse towards animals (Ascione et al., 2007).

Of women who have accessed refuges after being subjected to IPV, between 20-88 percent stated they had delayed leaving out of concern for a pet (Ascione et al., 2007; Daniell, 2001; Faver & Cavazos, 2007; Flynn, 2000; Fitzgerald, 2005; McIntosh, 2004), and research has rarely been conducted with non-resident populations. Volant et al (2008), however, departed from the traditional shelter-only sample and surveyed 102 women who had accessed any support services from a specialist domestic violence agency and 102 women who had not been subjected to violence, finding that women who had been abused were five times more likely to have had a partner who abused a pet. In most instances (61 percent), children witness this abuse towards pets (Carlisle-Frank et al., 2004), illustrating the paramountcy of protecting children from this secondary exposure to abuse by addressing pet abuse directly. Despite this documented prevalence internationally, there has only been one other comprehensive study into the phenomenon of pet harm as co-occurring with domestic violence in New Zealand. Roguski (2012) carried out both a survey and interviews with both victims and specialist providers, finding that 54 percent of victims had experienced threats to an animal and 36.5 percent had experienced an animal being actually harmed by an abuser.

Pet abuse is included in the category of psychological abuse in the power and control wheel model, which emerged out of a feminist analysis of the gendered pattern of coercive control (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Rates of co-occurrence of the two types of abuse in the United States range from 25 to 86 percent depending on the study (Ascione et al., 2007; Krienert, Walsh, Matthews, & McConkey, 2012; Wuerch, Giesbrecht, Price, Knutson, & Wach, 2017), however little is known about the potential for the housing and care options for animals within organisations supporting women who have been subjected to violence by intimate partners (Labrecque & Walsh, 2011). Flynn (2012) suggests that the oppression of animals through subjection to violence is interrelated with the subjugation of women and children by men in a patriarchal society, and as such that these issues should be addressed simultaneously. Many women are likely to regard pets as their closest companions (Labrecque & Walsh, 2011; Taylor, Funk, & Craghill, 2006) and are often distressed at the prospect of them being left with abusers (Faver & Strand, 2007). In fact, some survivors of intimate partner violence have cited the relationship with their pets as the only remaining positive relationship they have (Faver & Strand, 2007), and, in some instances, their sole remaining reason for living (Fitzgerald, 2007), further reinforcing the need for pets to be catered for during transitional periods of safety-seeking. This need thus became the focus for this research.

Methods

An online survey to explore victims' experiences of their abusive current or ex-partners' behaviour towards animals was distributed via social media platforms in 2018. The survey was open for three months, and was initially shared on the Women's Refuge Facebook page and subsequently shared by individuals and family violence-related organisations.

The survey was designed so that when prospective participants clicked on the survey link, they were firstly presented with a participant information page, which provided information on the nature and purpose of the survey and reiterated the importance of participation being voluntary and respondents' rights to stop or pause the survey at any time. They were then asked to tick a 'consent' box indicating that they understood and were freely participating.

The survey attracted 933 respondents, of whom 929 gave consent. The remaining four were simply taken to the end of the survey and thanked for their time. These participants represented a range of ethnicities, genders, regions, and animal ownership situations, as outlined below. However, not all participants responded to all questions, so this data remains incomplete and is therefore not wholly representative of all survey participants.

The survey asked participants which (if any) animals they had owned during their relationship with the abuser, and the types of abuse that was directed at their pets or other animals. Types of abuse were grouped in themes of threatening behaviours, psychological abuse or neglect, physical or sexual abuse, and coercion of a victim and/or their children by an abuser to cause harm to pets or other animals. These questions were quantitative, providing a list of abusive behaviours under each theme that participants could select if they had experienced a partner enacting one of the behaviours. Participants were then provided the opportunity to describe any behaviours not listed under a given theme, and were also provided space to describe in greater details their experiences of a partner using a pet or other animal in abusive or threatening ways.

The data was analysed using a combination of basic descriptive statistical analysis and thematic analysis of qualitative responses.

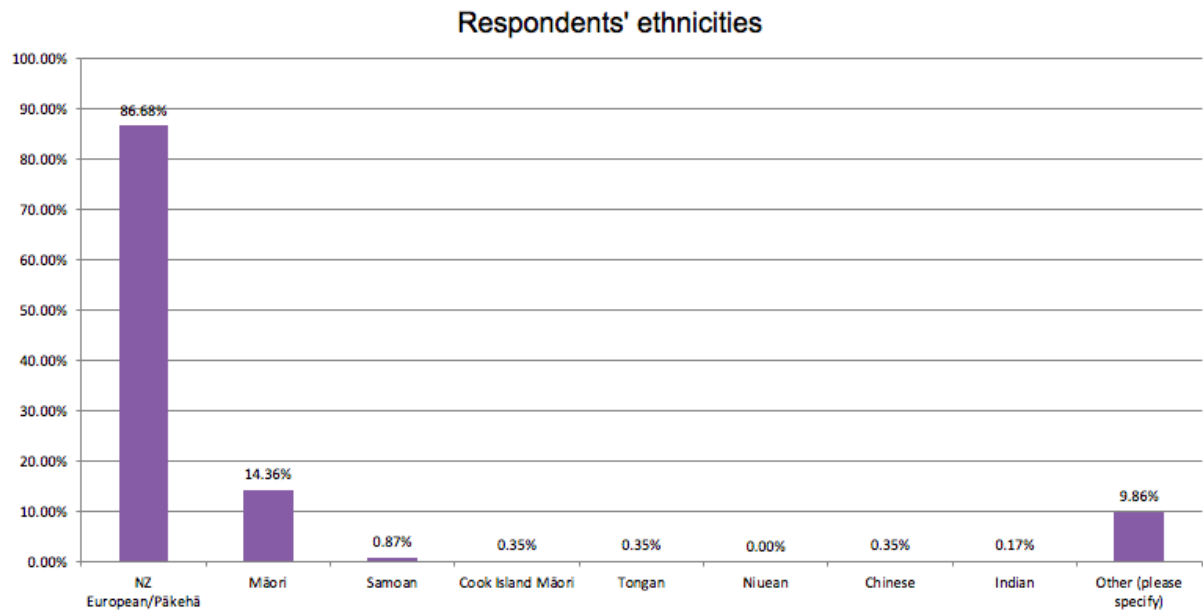


Figure 1: Ethnicities of respondents.

As the graph above shows, New Zealand European/Pākehā made up the largest proportion of participants who responded to this question (578 out of 933). Maori were the next biggest group at 14.4% of participants, followed by 'Other' which included various European identities, 'New Zealander' or 'Kiwi', Australian, South African, American, Eastern European identities, and a few other identities such as Jamaican, Fijian, Papuan, Canadian, South East Asian, and Japanese.

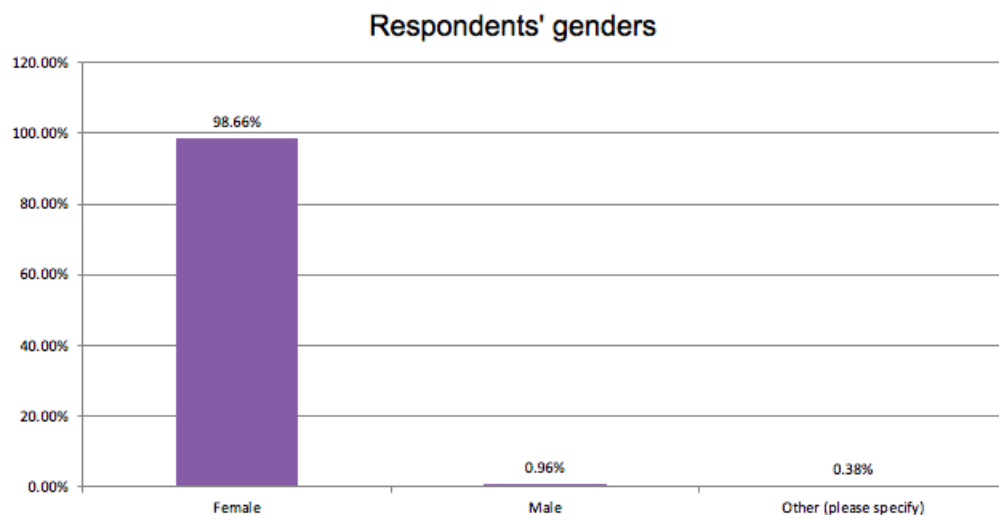


Figure 2. Genders of respondents.

Close to half of participants did not respond to the question about gender identity, with 523 out of 933 participants responding to this question. The majority of these participants were women (98.7%), while 1% identified as men, and 0.4% selected 'Other', specified by these participants as 'non-binary' and 'neutral'.

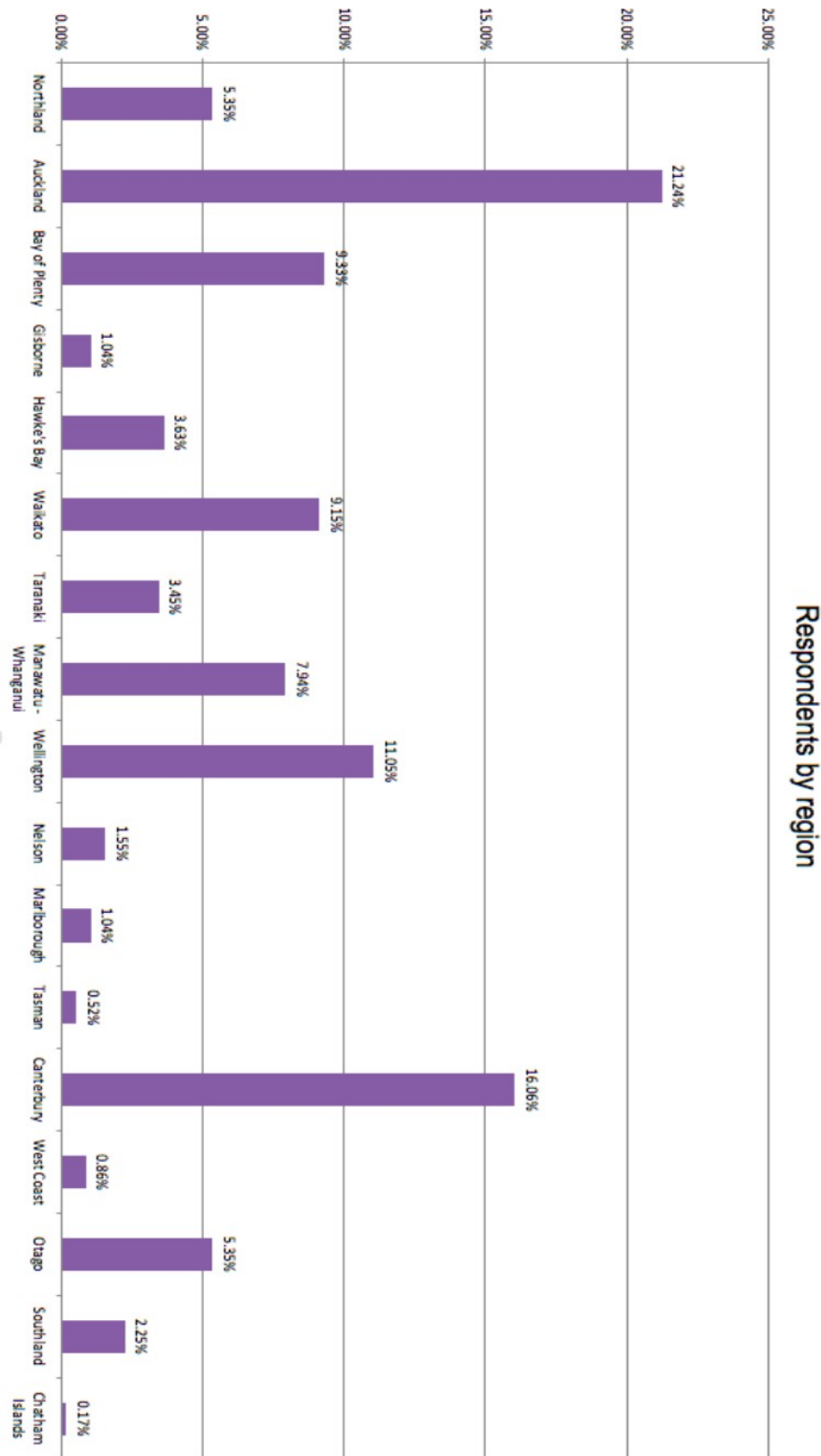


Figure 3. Regions respondents live in at the time of answering.

A slightly greater number of participants responded to the question about which region they are based (579 out of 933). There was a roughly even split between urban and rural regions, with reasonably proportional representation of all regions.

Findings

Types of pets and other animals

This section of the report sets out family violence survivors' experiences of abusers using pets and other

animals in violent or threatening ways. The vast majority (91.92%) of respondents indicated that they had owned a pet or farm animal at the time of the abuse.

Participants were asked what animals they had during their relationship with the abuser, and what animals specifically the abuser directed violent

and threatening behavior towards. The numbers of responses were similar for both questions, however slightly fewer people responded to the question about which animal was the target of abuse.

In the 'Other' category for both questions, the most commonly identified animal was chickens. Several participants also mentioned alpacas, rats or mice, turtles, and ducks. A chinchilla, hedgehog, deer, emu, reptile, frog, and an axolotl were also mentioned. One participant also noted that an 'aviary of birds' was targeted by the abuser.

As Figure 4 shows, the most commonly owned pets were cats and dogs, and these animals were also most often the targets of abuse, with dogs in particular as notable targets. This graph also shows that not all animals that were owned by participants became the targets of violent and threatening behavior by abusers. One possible explanation for this is the differing levels of emotional attachment participants had to different animals, with abusers targeting those animals that were most significant to participants, as highlighted by the qualitative responses set out later in this report.

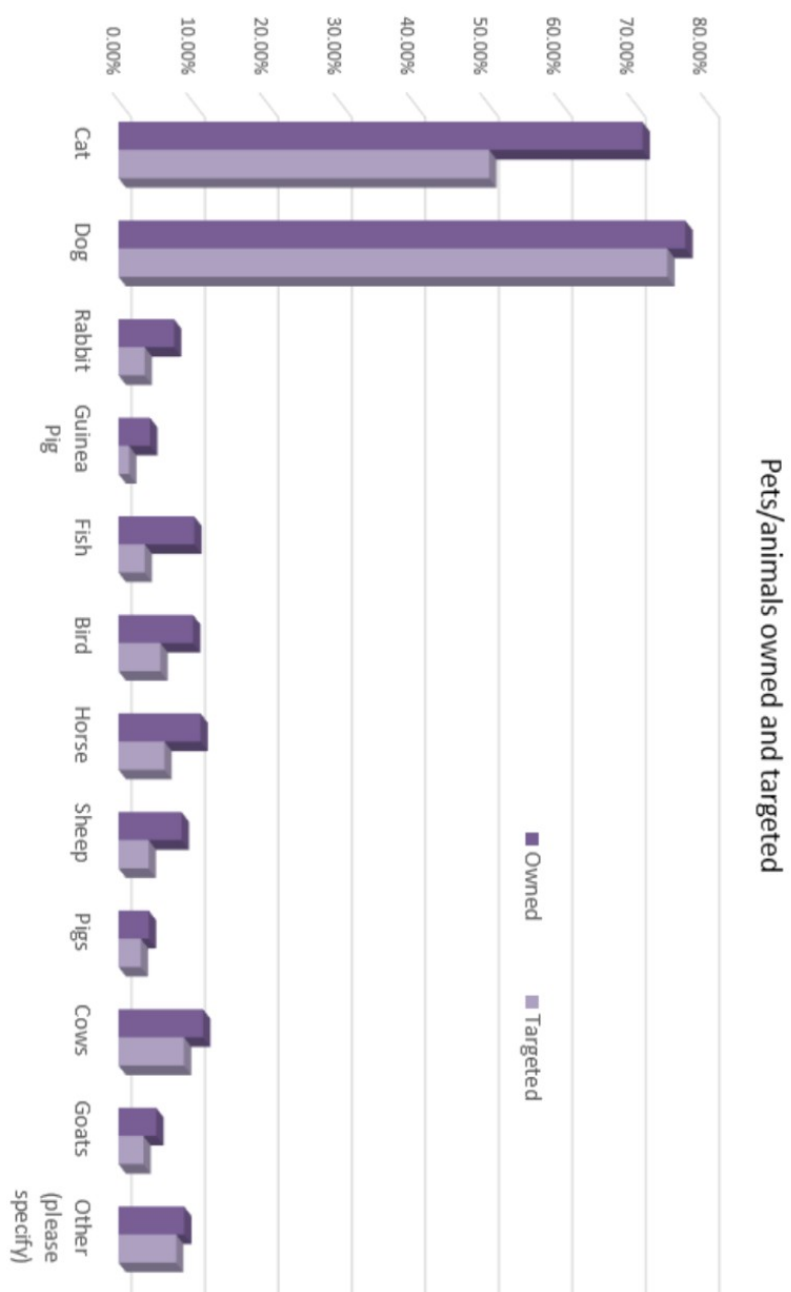


Figure 4. Percentage of each type of pet/farm animal owned by respondents in comparison to the percentage of each type of pet/farm animal targeted by respondents' abusers.

Methods of coercive control through threats or abuse of animals

Threats regarding mistreatment of animals constituted an important and influential part of the patterns of coercive control exercised over partners. Threats included threatening to get rid of an animal; threatening to harm or kill an animal; threatening to harm them in front of children; threatening to harm, kill, or get rid of an animal in a bid to get children to do something; and 'other' threats (such as a partner threatening suicide if the participant chose to take their pet to the vet over spending time with him; threatening to force the participant's child to kill the pet; threatening to leave the gates open so the dog would escape; threatening to drown themselves and the pets by driving into a river; and threatening to run over pets with the car).

These threats were alarmingly common. Threatening to harm, kill or get rid of a pet or farm animal were the most common threats used by abusers, with 45.3 percent of participants experiencing a partner threatening to harm, kill or get rid of an animal for the purpose of coercing them to do something. Over one fifth of participants who responded to this question had experienced a partner threatening to harm or kill an animal in front of participants' children and just over 10 percent of participants experienced a partner using threats to coerce participants' children to do something.

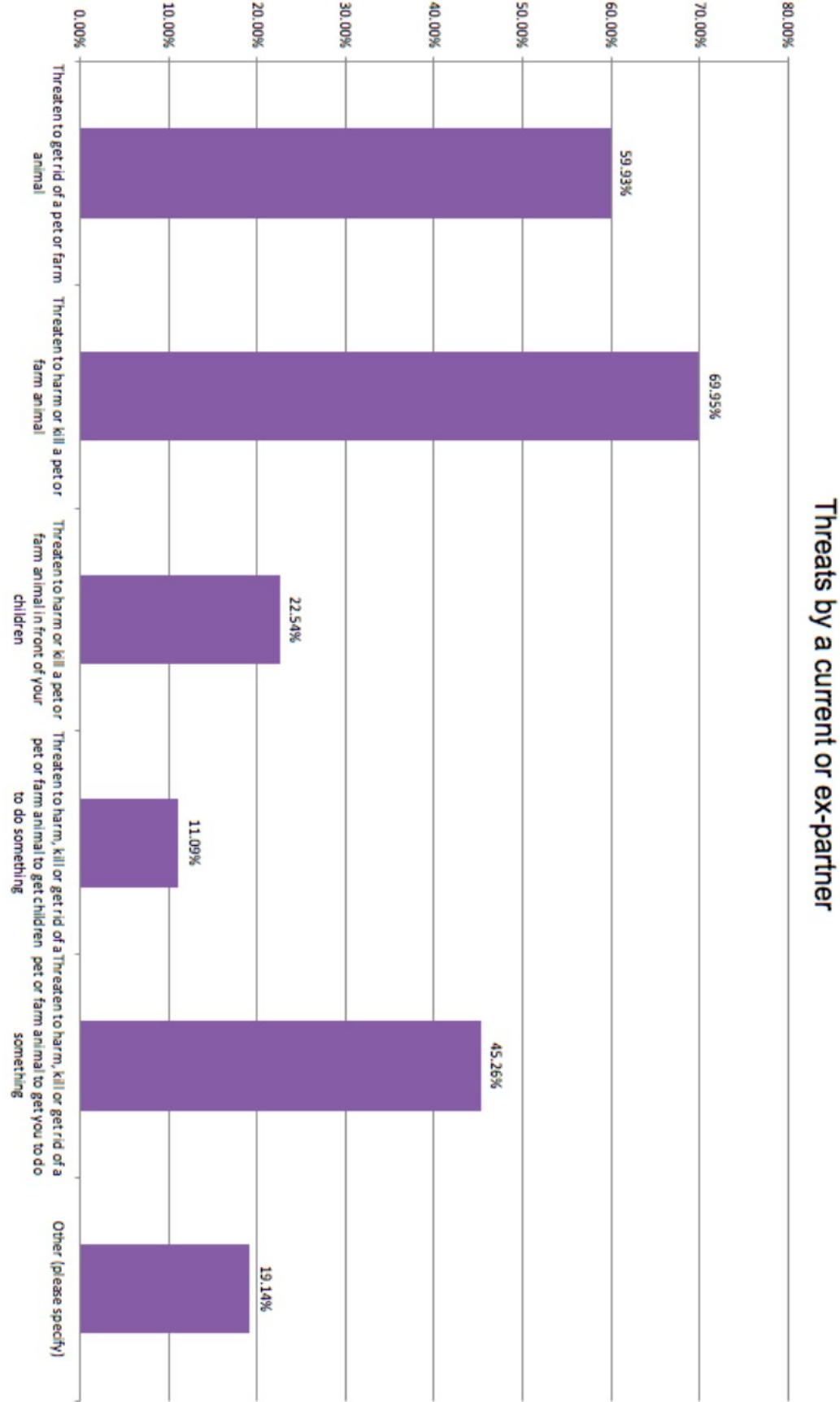


Figure 5. Types of threats made by abusers regarding animals.

Psychological abuse or neglect of pets or animals

Participants' partners (current or ex) intentionally intimidating or scaring a pet or other animal was the most common experience amongst participants who responded to this question, with 72% experiencing this. Leaving an animal outside for a long period, chasing an animal with the intention of harming them, confining an animal to an inappropriately small space, and putting an animal in an unsafe situation were also all experienced by around one third of participants who responded to this question. Around one fifth of participants had experienced a partner prevent an animal from getting medication for a health condition, being taken to the vet when injured or ill, or prevented them from getting food, water, or shelter. Finally, just under 15% had experienced a partner give drugs or alcohol to an animal, and 5% experienced a partner forcing their pet or other animal to fight with another animal.

Respondents also gave descriptions of other methods of psychological abuse or neglect of animals that they had witnessed, including examples of neglect (e.g. not feeding pets, refusing to provide shelter to pets in storms, and withholding money for medication for the pet) and abandonment; yelling at pets; leaving a puppy outside when she was on heat for the first time with an older male unneutered dog; and urinating on pets.

Physical or sexual abuse of pets or animals

The most common types of physical abuse used by participants' current or ex-partners were kicking, smacking, and throwing objects at an animal, with 73.5 percent, 63.5 percent, and 60.3 percent of participants witnessing this respectively. Close to half of these participants' partners also hit pets or animals with objects and nearly one quarter experienced a partner killing a pet or other animal during their relationship. Just over 10 percent experienced a partner shooting or choking a pet or farm animal, and seven percent experienced a partner drowning a pet or farm animal. Fewer than five percent of these participants experienced a partner poisoning, stabbing, burning, or sexually harming a pet or other animal.

As with psychological abuse, respondents also offered additional information about ways that current or ex-partners had physically or sexually abused animals. Reported methods were pushing or throwing an animal off or over a high surface or from a moving car; threatening to put or actually putting a pet in a microwave; hanging a pet from a clothes line and spinning it around; putting pets in the freezer; holding or pinning pets down; pouring turpentine on a pet and setting it on fire; eating pet birds; boiling a pet; carrying a pet in a harmful way, for example by its hind legs; squeezing a pet too hard with the intention of harming it; using a shock

collar until the pet bled from the electric current; driving a car over pets; twisting pets' tails; and vigorously shaking the pet.

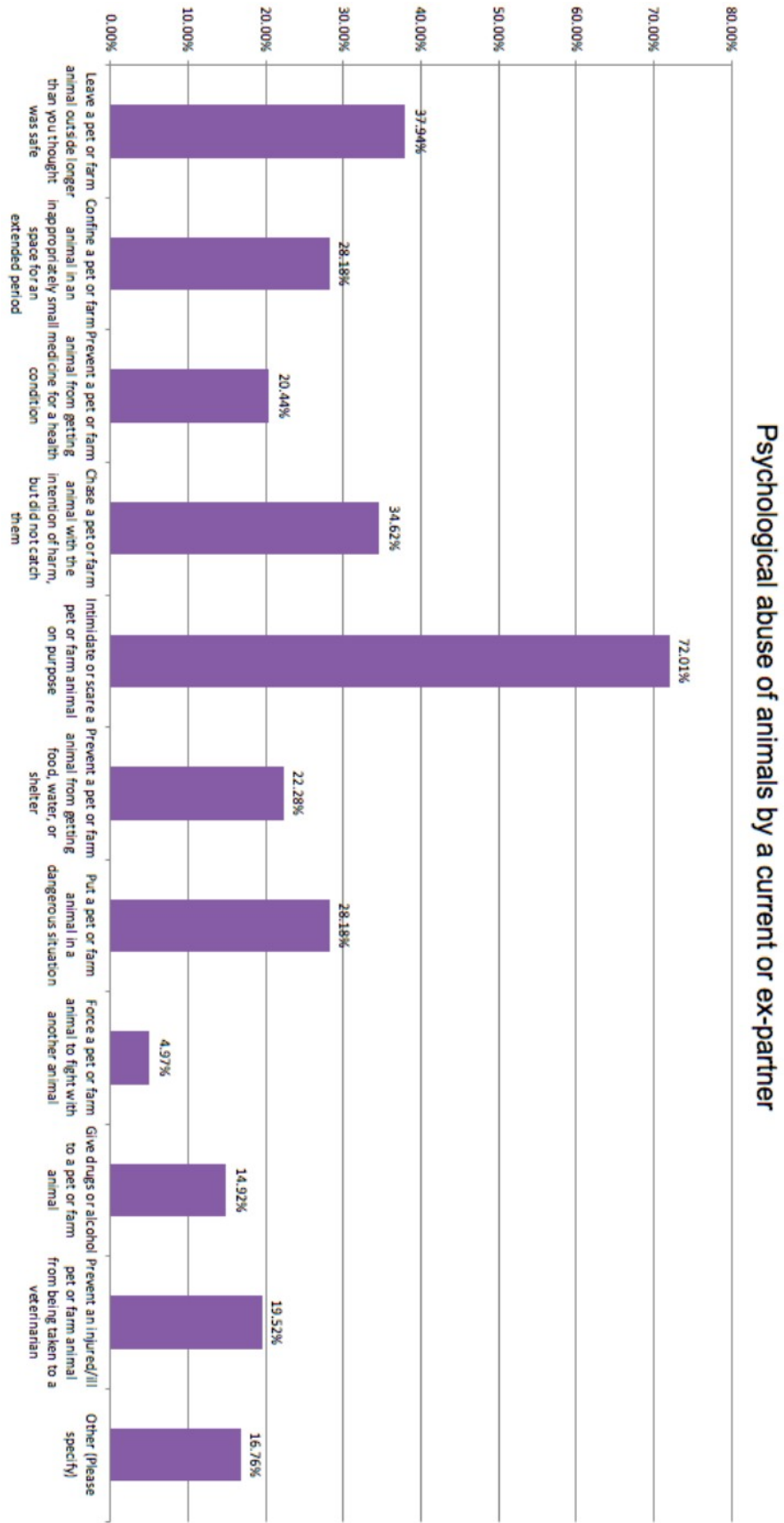


Figure 6. Types of psychological abuse and neglect of pets and other animals by respondents' current or ex-partners.

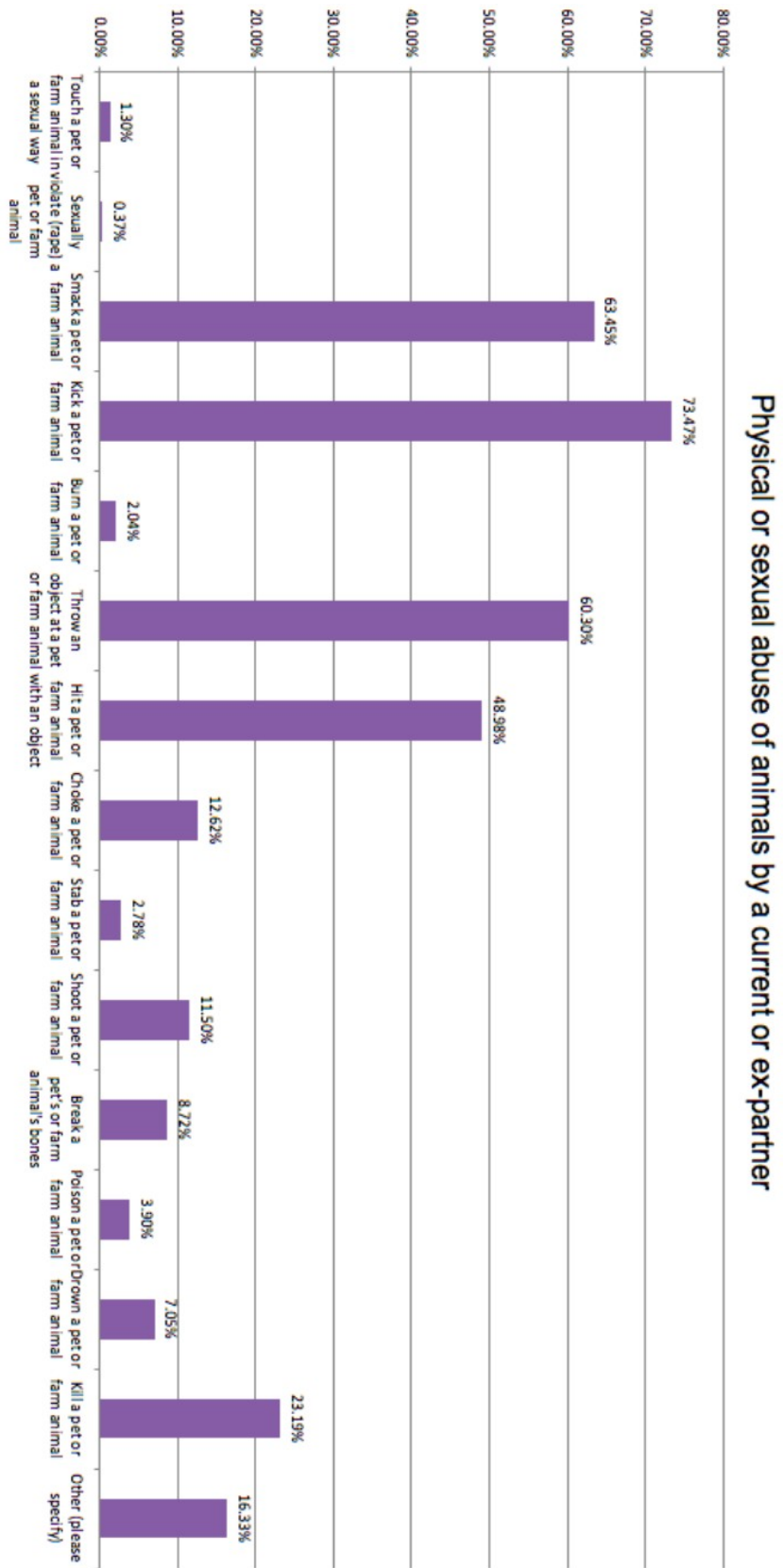


Figure 7. Types of physical and sexual abuse of pets and other animals by respondents' current or ex-partners.

Dynamics of abuse involving animals: respondents' experiences

The continuum of abuse - disinterest to sadistic killing

Respondents' stories of abuse showed a large continuum of experiences: for some, partners' involvement in the welfare of their animals was dissatisfying because they showed carelessness or did not prioritise their wellbeing (such as in the case of one victim, whose partner showed little interest in the wellbeing of her rabbit and resented her taking time away from him to take it to the vet). For others, however, the abuse involved shooting a pony in front of their child, beating and killing kittens as punishment for the victim's apparent bad behaviour as perceived by the abuser, or duct-taping or smashing the skulls of dogs.

My sheep got stuck in a fence, but instead of letting me untangle her, he punched her in the face until she backed out.

He strangled my cats almost on a daily basis and wouldn't feed them if I wasn't there.

He kicked the cows and pigs in the stomachs.

This violence appeared to be typically accompanied with the escalation of other forms of aggression, such as toward the respondent.

Common and uncommon themes in harming animals

In their descriptions of how animals were harmed by abusive partners, respondents' comments repeatedly referenced shooting, kicking, starving, and torturing. Less common themes (such as putting animals in the microwave) also featured.

He put my cat in the microwave while he was drunk because he thought it was funny. The microwave burst my cat's eardrums so now he's permanently deaf.

Abusing animals in front of children – either to constitute an implicit threat or to attempt to 'harden up' children's sensitivity – was reported as particularly depressing by respondents.

He hit our mother cat's head till it fits out and died in front of me and my children, blood everywhere, then I had to leave them still in the shed where it happened.

When the puppies were born, he took my two sons (aged 5 and 8) out to the shed and shot the pups dead while the boys watched.

Getting animals high or drunk was also a commonly reported method of abuse – with respondents saying that the abuser typically found this amusing.

My husband (at the time) celebrated my puppies 1st birthday while I was at work. He and a mate thought it was funny getting him drunk.

The dog was his and he used to kick it and drag it around a lot. The main thing was that [he?] would always get wasted and then find this stuff so funny. He found the animals whimpering and crying so damn

funny. And he used to get the dog stoned whenever he smoked by blowing in its face.

While relatively uncommon, several respondents detailed the sexual assaults the abuser had subjected an animal to.

Other times I caught him outside our house, on nights when he came home drunk, lying on the ground with his pants down and he'd be holding the family dog by the collar, forcing it to sniff or lick his genitals. At first, I thought that he had fallen over while trying to pee in the backyard and was holding on to the dog to try and get up. I did think it was strange, but I couldn't quite put 2 and 2 together as that sort of behaviour was unfathomable to me. But later on in the relationship, I actually caught him trying to get our dog to have sex with him in our bedroom and that's when the penny dropped as to what I had seen him doing in the past.

Distinct purposes of control and intimidation

In many examples provided by respondents, the abuser's acts of abuse or aggression against animals clearly represented an attempt to control the victim(s), or intimidate them into compliance.

He would buy or be given kittens which he would gift to me and the kids. These were then used as pawns against me, and I witnessed 7 kittens suffering and being killed for disobeying him or standing up to him.

He threatened to slit the dogs' throats if I left.

After being manipulated to keep having sex with him after our break up, he threatened to chop up my dearly loved cat. So I was forced to not only do so but people thought I was into him so I lost all my friends.

He after we separated (with a protection order covering myself and the children) he threatened to kill and shoot a ram I purchased for my sheep. The ram was indeed dead in the paddock a few later.

As these quotes evidence, victims' profound affection for their pets and other animals and concern for their welfare preclude their exercising of autonomy; in particular, actions that contradict the abuser's wants. In addition, the completion of these threats – such as the killing of kittens and of the ram – reinforce the intention behind the intimidation, conveying to victims that disobedience will be punished through serious violence thereby representing a powerful disincentive to victim resistance.

Asserting supremacy as sole or primary object of affection

In addition to asserting or maintaining control, abusers appeared motivated by a desire to assert their supremacy as the most important object of respondents' affections, by subjugating their relationship with pets such as through threats or actual violence.

*When he came home drunk, he would hit or kick our family dog if it got in his way in order to start a fight. I would defend the dog by putting myself in the middle then he would say things like, "you love that f****n dog more than me. I'll put a bullet between its eyes and yours too if you don't look out".*

He was jealous of his own children and jealous of my animals.

[He played] mind games all the time - "if you had to choose between me and the dog who would it be" and [I was] constantly walking on eggshells... [the] puppy followed me around and my partner would get angry and jealous... it was jealousy more than anything, and then anger took over... he strangled my cat one day to where my cat's eye went red.

Respondents' comments illustrate how in the face of 'jealousy' they were forced to reiterate their primary loyalty to the abuser or live with the consequences of animal abuse.

Silencing

Threats to pets and animals also functioned to suppress disclosure of abuse towards victims and their children.

He threatened to kill pets in front of me if I told anyone about his abuse of me.

He threatened to kill my cat when confronted with his lying and infidelity.

He also killed my daughter's Guinea pigs in front of her and told her that the same thing would happen to myself and my son if she disclosed his sexual abuse of her.

The manipulation, lies, inability to accept blame and lack of remorse all made me certain that this man is capable of anything.

Emotional impacts

Respondents' reactions to their awareness (whether sudden or gradual) of the abuse of their animals by their intimate partner featured shock, terror, and powerlessness.

I realise that in the scheme of things this is all pretty mild - it could have been SO much worse. But it was definitely enough to lend an extra layer of terror to everything else that was happening.

I was disgusted every time, [and I] felt powerless and hopeless.

It traumatised me and children

It was the most traumatic thing I've ever experienced, and it has been very difficult to try and move on from.

These emotional impacts were occasionally exacerbated by a sense of hopelessness arising from the perceived futility of trying to escape without harm

to themselves or their pets, whether as a result of the sheer magnitude of the threats or by the difficulty in getting others to recognise the abuse.

My ex would also hang my kids' cats from their throats, and throw them against walls, [and] kick them so hard they would fly. [He would also] beat the dogs with sticks, and snap cows' tails, hit them with chains, punch them etc. But had the ability to blame everyone else, and make good friends with local vets etc so no one would believe what was truly happening behind the closed doors. He was so charming that he knew he could do anything, and people would believe whatever he said.

Coercion into harming pets or other animals

Close to half of the 362 participants who responded to this question had been made to watch their pet or another animal be harmed by their partner, or their children had been forced to watch. Over 40 percent had also experienced a partner force them to get rid of a pet or other animal. Respondents' other experiences of being forced to harm pets or other animals included their partners preventing them from attending to the animal's needs; forcing them to euthanize their pets; bulling into using cruel training techniques with the animal; and creating such dangerous situations that they felt compelled to give the animal away.

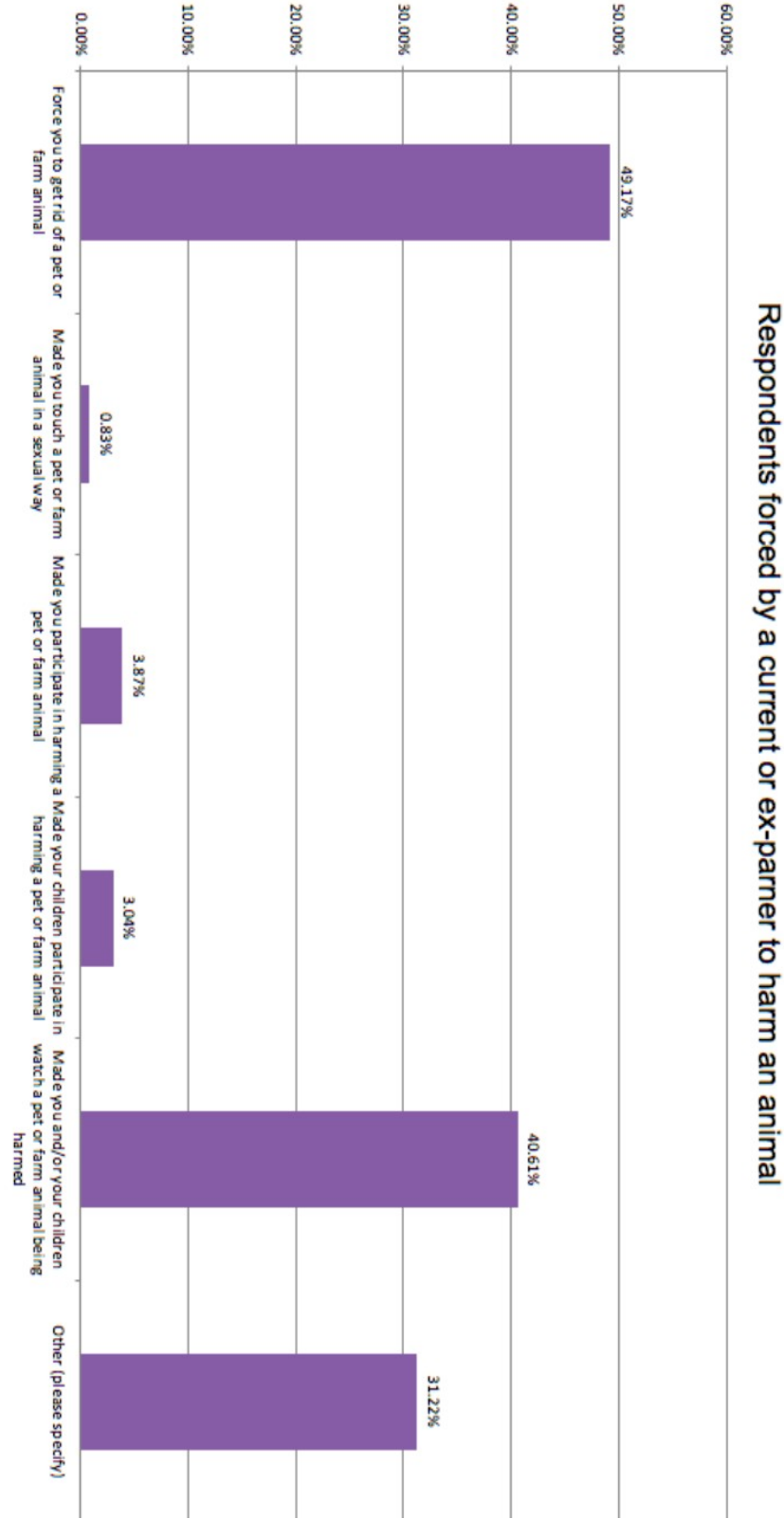


Figure 8. Ways that respondents were forced by a current or ex-partner to harm a pet or other animal.

Delaying leaving

More than half (53 percent) of respondents did not leave the abuser when they wanted to out of fear for a pet or farm animal's safety. When expanding on their decision to stay, at least temporarily, to offer some form of protection to these animals, they shared their intense desire to keep animals safe. Many participants considered leaving without their animals as unthinkable, thus the fact that residential services like Women's Refuges did not allow pets posed a significant barrier. Participants perceived that they needed to act as a buffer between the abuser and the animal, noted their difficulty in finding alternative accommodation for pets, and their experiences of abusers capitalising on their fear and following through on their threats. Many respondents commented on feeling trapped because they felt they needed to secure the safety of the animals.

I had to make sure that the pet was relocated first

I stayed to try and keep animals safe, but it only got worse.

I was scared for his dog, I didn't want to leave it with him to suffer. I don't know how often he fed the dog when I wasn't there.

Women's refuge shelters don't take in animals, and I didn't want to abandon them

He threatened to kill my dogs if I left

He knew I loved my cat and rat more than life itself... he knew it would always make me come back if he threatened them. And women's refuge didn't take pets, so I had no way out.

Being a buffer between the abuser and animal was a role many respondents felt compelled to take on, feeling that their presence would somewhat ameliorate the risk of harm.

I was the only thing stopping a dairy herd from being tortured and beaten twice a day

Back then I didn't know help existed and I felt if I stayed, I could monitor the situation and be a buffer so his anger wouldn't be taken out on the dogs. I also was scared he'd kill them in retaliation for me leaving.

Perceived inaccessibility of options for pet care also precluded participants from feeling able to leave and enter a housing situation that disallowed pets while being confident that they would stay safe.

Not being able to find emergency care for animals did stop me leaving many times and made it much harder.

For some, although the possibility of temporary care was raised, the prospect of separation was a significant enough deterrent that staying with the abuser was regarded as preferable.

I was told she would go into a pet refuge if I needed to go to the refuge... I did not want to be separated from my dog.

One respondent described the way in which her abuser had capitalised on this fear of leaving animals behind to be abused, and lured her back to the house.

He used to use her as a reason to come back. When I was four months pregnant, I wasn't going to come home from work, he waited outside my work. Told me she was really sick and that we needed to rush her to her vet who lived rurally. He took me back to the house and I was never allowed to go to work again

Another's abuser had actualised the threat of animal abuse in front of her, demonstrating the severe consequences he would dole out if she attempted to leave.

This was often when he would hurt my animals.... or when I went home "to teach me a lesson" so I wouldn't try to leave again. The 3 cats and two dogs he actually murdered (when I didn't return) he videoed and showed me when I was stupid enough to go back

Finally, 'the system' was considered to be flawed in its lack of provision for both caring for animals who are displaced as a result of intimate partner violence and in its investigation and response to allegations of animal abuse. Respondents mentioned not feeling believed, and not having pet safety considered in safety planning.

When I decided to get out, the pets went with me. The farm animals I rang MAF and reported what was going on. MAF did nothing.

In some instances, respondents returned to the abuser in order to check on the safety of animals or to provide continued care. Livestock was seen as especially important to continue to care for, as they could not be uplifted and continuity was seen as essential.

It is difficult to leave the relationship when you have a lifestyle block and the animals require care. You have to return to provide care to the animals whether you stay or not it still puts me in danger to care for them.

Imagining a possibility of temporary animal accommodation

Several respondents had found temporarily solutions to housing their pets while they sought help and re-established their lives.

I did have a cattery owner board my cats for free while in refuge

I would have left earlier knowing they were somewhere safe and being cared for. That would have given me more time to sort myself out. I couldn't find somewhere I could take my cat and 2 remaining rats. My rats eventually went to a lady I used to work with and my cat stayed at another former co-worker's house.

It would have been easier in the sense that I would know that the dog would be safe. It was very hard to escape and stay in a Women's Refuge and rely on a friend to care for the dog, it was lucky that I had the friend who was willing to do that otherwise I don't know what I would have done.

However, many could not find suitable solutions, and identified this as being a key barrier to leaving the abusive partner.

I had to give up my cat (my baby) one of the worst days because I escaped to a room in a shared house and couldn't take [the cat]. A few months later I was in a place where I could have taken back or relocated the cat elsewhere longer term. I will always worry about what happened to my little lad.

Most respondents who commented indicated that if a suitable, affordable alternative to housing their pets was in place at the time, it would have encouraged them to take steps to leave when fear for pets' safety was otherwise inhibiting this.

I would have left him a full 2 years earlier!

This would absolutely be a solution for women in this predicament. They want to leave, but not at the expense of losing their loved pet. If there was an emergency shelter that allowed them to retain ownership of their pet without surrendering, women would take this option and be able to get the help they need

Sadly, at the times I wanted to leave but didn't because I knew I couldn't take everyone including the dog with me. When I contacted the local pound about temporary housing, they said that we had to give up our dog for adoption in order for them to look after him and we wouldn't get him back. But if there was a shelter that took animals temporarily, I would have left the relationship a lot sooner than I did as I had to wait for my

circumstances to change and allow me to take our dog with us before making the move.

However, those without household pets (such as livestock or horses) noted that this would still not cater for all situations and all types of pets.

I had horses not the thing you put in a shelter.

Finally, respondents described the emotional attachment they had for pets, and the centrality of these relationships to their lives – and, accordingly, the need for this to be considered when making plans for safety.

Pets are part of our lives, we love and care for them, in order to leave we need to know they will be safe and cared for to. Just makes things easier with less stress and guilt.

It sounds pretty selfish, but I didn't want to abandon my animals permanently, I wanted them there with me as they were all that I had. If I gave them to the SPCA/rehomed, I'd never get them back. I also didn't have money for a cattery / pet sitter (being 17 and on \$8/hr back then) so that wasn't an option. In my situation, if there was a temporary refuge to home them, it probably wouldn't have made a difference as I didn't want to leave him, however, I can see in other people's circumstances how such a place could definitely make the transition a lot easier, a lot less stress free and of course, taking care of the animals wellbeing.

In conclusion, respondents viewed a temporarily pet accommodation option as generally favourable, and as a resource that could significantly influence decision-making in crisis situations.

Discussion

More than half of participants in this study did not leave at the time when they would have liked to because of their feelings of responsibility towards pets and other animals. This is consistent with (but on the high end of) rates of delayed leaving in previous studies (Ascione et al., 2007; Daniell, 2001; Faver & Cavazos, 2007; Flynn, 2000; Fitzgerald, 2005; McIntosh, 2004; Volant et al., 2008). There were several interlinked reasons for this – the intense desire to keep pets safe, the need to act as a buffer to soften abusive treatment, the difficulty in finding alternative caring accommodation for pets, and the knowledge that threats would be (and had previously been) followed through on. These stated reasons have implications for domestic violence advocacy – housing options that disallow pets may not be suitable for some victims, and victims may prioritise animal safety over their own when considering the potential for leaving (Faver & Cavazos, 2007, Volant et al., 2008).

The methods of abuse and motivations for abuse may also have advocacy implications. Unlike the majority of research investigating the co-occurrence of intimate partner and pet abuses, this report identified a range of unorthodox methods through which pets were harmed (such as setting pets on fire, throwing them off tall buildings, and putting them on washing lines or into microwaves). While relatively unexplored, the level of severity of abuse toward pets could potentially indicate escalating severity of violence towards the human victim.

Similarly, themes of possible motivation also emerged throughout this research, but are with few exceptions absent beyond brief conjecture in previous research reports. While it is often posited, for example, that abusers use the threat of pet abuse to induce compliance and obedience in their human victim (DeVoe & Smith, 2002; Loring & Beaudoin, 2000), participants' allusions to abusers' purposeful harming of animals can be further classified into three distinct motivations. Roguski (2012) similarly identified a range of motivations, but found that harming animals was a substitute for harming women and children that did not similarly result in an arrest – a motivation not identifiable within this study. However, his grouping of other perceived motivations was consistent with our finding that harming animals appeared driven by the three motivations identified here: control and intimidation, assertions of supremacy, and silencing of disclosures. This has important ramifications for support work – if acts of violence that represent control and intimidation (such as an abuser killing kittens after a victim's show of defiance or resistance) can be distinguished from acts of violence that emerged out of abusers' assertions of their supremacy within the pecking order of the victim's affections (such as hurting animals if affection for them is shown by the

victim, or if the victim does not profess their love for the abuser as superior to other forms of love) or acts of violence designed to silence victims (such as an abuser killing pets as a warning not to disclose sexual abuse) this may provide valuable insight into underlying dynamics in the relationship that are created by the abuser. This represents an underexplored area of the intersection between pet and intimate partner abuse.

The principal implication emerging from this research, however, is the need to identify suitable accommodation for pets who are victims of abuse within the context of intimate partner violence. The potential to access caring short-term accommodation for animals was highly regarded by respondents in this study, with many lauding it as the only possible way to ensure the safety of all victims and to extend the choice to leave to those who had pet 'family members' to worry about alongside themselves and their children. For these victims, animal abuse went beyond simply deterring the victim from leaving; it also compelled return after a leaving attempt – particularly if the abuser did in fact follow through on the threat and cause demonstrable harm to an animal after an attempt at leaving, as was noted by Carlisle-Frank et al. (2004). While it was acknowledged that this would not be universally suitable due to the practicalities of housing animals such as livestock, the majority endorsed such a programme and indicated that their own experiences could have been drastically improved with its availability. The survey showed that dogs, followed by cats, were by far the most frequently targeted animal in situations of abuse. That nearly half of participants had partners who had threatened to kill or hurt one of these animals is testament to how widespread the phenomenon of using pets as a manipulative tool in a pattern of power and control is amongst victims of abuse, and indicative of a long-standing need for specific support mechanisms that cater for pets. Even more worryingly, more than three quarters of respondents had experienced a current or ex-partner physically hurting a pet – positioning pets not just as pawns to be used to manipulate partners, but as primary victims of violence in need of protection. Evidently, temporary accommodation for dogs and cats would be the most in demand from this population.

Conclusions

The co-occurrence of abuse towards women and children and abuse towards animals has been well evidenced both in New Zealand and internationally. This research adds further support to the argument that they should be addressed simultaneously, and that pets form a central consideration in safety planning for victims who are considering leaving an abuser.

This study identified three discrete but often overlapping motivations of abusers; namely, intimidating victims into compliance, asserting supremacy as the principal beneficiary of affection, and silencing. These collectively served to establish and maintain a differential power structure (and victims' accordant lack of options) within the relationship, and as such should be explicitly asked about by support services aimed at assisting victims. Moreover, with over half of respondents indicating that they would have left sooner if they did not have the remaining issue of how to care for and protect their pets, there is a clear and compelling mandate to extend services that encompass animal care and protection to victims who are seeking help.

The severity of abuse towards animals by abusive intimate partners is grotesquely illustrated throughout respondents' narratives in this report. Moreover, the effects of the threats of and actualised psychological and physical abuse towards animals proved to have far-reaching impacts – in addition to delaying and deterring leaving and precipitating distress and trauma in participants (and potentially their children, who frequently witnessed this abuse), participants' comments highlighted significant harm and loss of life of the animals themselves, who became secondary victims as a result of the violence. This harm and loss of life also signposts an ethical imperative to addressing issues of safety for all victims, not simply human ones. Addressing the safety issues of animals would arguably be best served by the establishment of a specialist service aimed at caring for pets for an interim time during transition periods.

This research looked only at the experiences of people who had been both a victim of domestic violence and experienced pet abuse. It is thus unable to make inferences about prevalence or co-occurrence, but rather attempts to give voice to the multitude of victims' experiences of having a pet threatened or abused. These threats and actual abuse towards animals constitute a key and influential component of the larger pattern of power and control that participants in this research had been subjected to by a current or ex-partner. In sum, the following conclusions and recommendations emerged from the research:

1. Animal abuse should be understood as a tool used by abusers to assert and maintain power over victims;
2. Victims' attachments to and concerns for pets forms a notable and distressing barrier to leaving and should be routinely asked about by support services;
3. Animals themselves become victims as a result of this abuse; and
4. A discrete service aimed solely at pet care and protection is needed to fill the current gap in services.

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